

Appleby Archaeology Group

On Tuesday May 14th the Appleby Archaeology Group were entertained and informed when Adrian and Elaine Waite talked about the Red Wyvern Society.

Adrian and Elaine set up the Red Wyvern Society, which seeks to re-create as many aspects as possible of life in Britain in the period of the Wars of the Roses, 1450-1500. To bring these troubled times back to life the Society presents re-enactments of battles and of everyday life for example archery practice, entertainments and most importantly cooking. The Society usually depicts the Clifford Household, one of the most powerful in England at the time and supporters of the House of Lancaster. The Red Wyvern Society is one of many interested in this period and members travel to different parts of the country for re-enactments.

Historical re-enactment has become very popular in the last twenty years and there are societies for most periods such as the Sealed Knot for the Civil Wars of the 1640s. People join for a number of reasons; an interest in history, an opportunity to take part in martial arts or the crafts of the time and for the chance to act..

Members are also involved in researching the period and in making authentic copies of objects then in use. The popularity of historical re-enactment has resulted in the growth of an industry to reproduce articles such as armour, pottery and weapons.

Both speakers were dressed in the clothes of the period, which they had made. Clothes were bright and made of wool or linen and well worn. Adrian wore colourful woollen hose, one leg red and one yellow. His shoes were leather and known as turnsoles. Elaine was in a linen kirtle gown over a chemise. As the household cook she needed to kirtle up her skirts to try and keep them from the fire as hearth death was a common cause of death in women. The wearing and making of the clothes of the period has led to greater understanding of their comfort and the wear and tear on them. In the late 15th century pockets were unknown and everyday utensils were hung from a belt around the waist.

Elaine described her role as cook to the household and showed the group a variety of utensils that

she uses as she cooks over an open wood fire. It was interesting to see that the design of cook's knives has not changed since the Romans. Lord Clifford's army was always on the move and the cook tended to go ahead of the soldiers to the camp. Elaine cooks the food of the time at re-enactments, sometimes for as many as three hundred. The diet was principally bread, cheese, vegetables, fish and a little meat, which was usually rancid and had to be flavoured by fruits. Dishes such as fish in salt dough, stews, soups and pig roast are features of re-enactments. There was no tea or coffee and the household drank leaf infusions, ale and wine.

Adrian then dressed in the armour of the time and described and demonstrated some the weaponry used including different types of swords and a crossbow. He explained that for the ordinary man his armour and indeed his clothes might be a hotchpotch of pieces retrieved from the battle field or handed down by will. He wore plate armour protecting legs, arms, head and stomach. Gauntlets were worn to fend off sword blows. Beneath the armour he wore a thickly padded waistcoat called a jack which gave good protection from arrows, as the head became entangled in the wool padding. He said that most fighting men were foot soldiers and fought out of loyalty to their Lord when his interests were threatened.

Adrian and Elaine then answered a number of questions from the floor and those present were able to look at and handle the armour, weapons and cooking utensils on display. Everyone was struck by the enthusiasm of the speakers and their obvious enjoyment of re-enacting life in the late 15th century and discovering more about the period.

Phyllis Rouston May 19th 2002